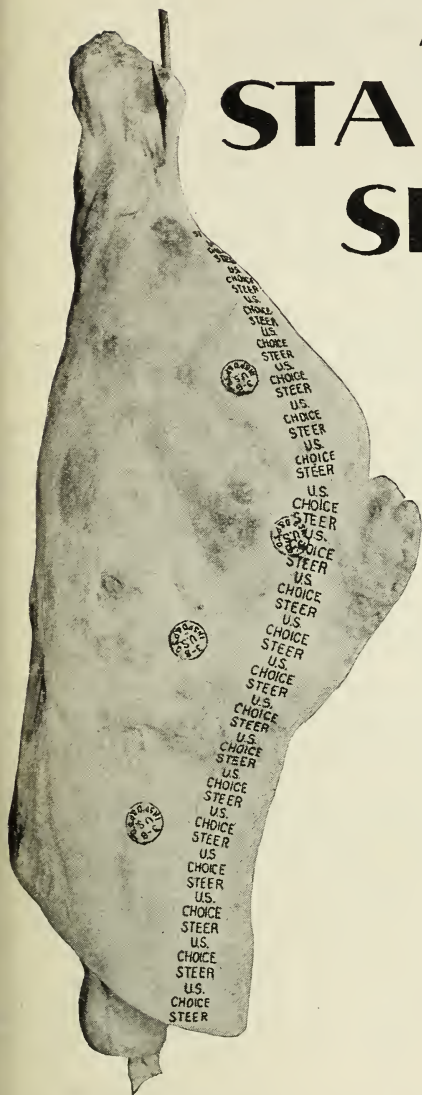


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# BEEF GRADING AND STAMPING SERVICE



Rev.ed.  
follows

**LEAFLET  
NO. 67**

**UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

## BEEF GRADING AND STAMPING SERVICE

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Commercial beef grading in some form is generally understood to have had its inception at the time slaughtering was inaugurated in central points, located near sources of production and remote from centers of consumption. Coincident with the growth and expansion of the country and the separation of production and consumption areas the need for more exact grading or sorting began to develop.

Necessity for some system of beef grading reached its first climax with the introduction of western dressed beef in the large consuming markets of the East. Coming from range, feed lot, and prairie, the beef possessed a corresponding wide range of quality, and the term "beef" often did not have the same significance as had been commonly understood in most markets.

With the advent of the refrigerator car, about 1880, and improved transportation facilities, competition in the sale of western dressed beef increased and with it the need for uniform grade descriptions or specifications.

Slaughterers located in the Middle West, contiguous to the great producing areas, depended in large measure upon consumers in the cities along the Atlantic seaboard for a regular market. The sale of a highly perishable commodity was involved. This period has been referred to as "the hectic days" in the beef business.

There was a pressing need for definite standards for grades of beef. Except for pork cuts scarcely any two packers graded meats exactly alike. For example, one packer might ship as "good to choice beef" what another packer called "medium natives," and a third called "good westerns."

Little or no attention was given to grading the carcasses on basis of uniform quality. The result of this confusion was frequent misunderstanding between buyers and sellers regarding both quality and price.

Later as some attempt was made to separate the "native" group into smaller groups, the terms "choice natives," "good natives," and "medium natives" came into use. So-called "westerns" were subdivided into "choice," "good," "medium," and "common westerns." The multiplicity of groups or classes with a corresponding multiplicity of grades within each group tended to further confusion. Moreover the beef-slaughtering industry in general was inclined to change the grade according to the season and the predominant quality of beef available until it came to the realization that shifting standards tended to intensify rather than to help in solving the problem.

Since about 1915, the United States Department of Agriculture, through the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in cooperation with other agencies, has been working on practical standards for grades of beef and other classes of meats in conjunction with its standardization program for livestock and other products of the farms. As a result, tentative standards for classes and grades of beef were of-

ferred for market-reporting purposes in 1916. After thorough tests these standards were later made official for the country and are now being used generally by the livestock and meat industries.

### Experimental Grading and Stamping Service

An organization known as the Better Beef Association, including representatives of practically all existing cattlemen's associations, was formed to improve marketing conditions and began its activities during the year 1926. Later in the same year this association became affiliated with the National Live Stock and Meat Board and through the combined efforts of the two organizations an agreement was entered into early in 1927 with representative beef slaughterers which involved grading and stamping beef carcasses and cuts by official graders in accordance with the official class and grade standards of the United States Department of Agriculture. Through the cooperation of all these interests and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, a plan of procedure was developed to conduct this beef grading and stamping as an experiment at Boston, Mass., New York, N. Y., Philadelphia, Pa., Washington, D. C., Chicago, Ill., Omaha, Nebr., Kansas City and St. Joseph, Mo., and Sioux City, Iowa.

One phase of the agreement insisted upon by the beef slaughterers, many of whom were skeptical regarding the plan, was that no beef should receive the official grade stamp until orders for Government graded and stamped beef had been received from retailers. As retailers generally had been accustomed to "shopping around" in order to find the particular type of carcass they wanted, this proviso naturally limited the work, especially as retailers located at a distance from cities where official graders were available, were not inclined to favor the plan.

Actual official grading and stamping in accordance with the agreement was begun at Chicago on May 2, 1927. In the beginning, the service was limited to two grades—Prime and Choice steer and heifer beef. In January, 1928, the service was extended to include Good grade steer and heifer beef. The service was later extended to include all grades upon request from retailers or others.

As the grading and stamping experimental service developed and its value to the industry at large became known, some packers in various cities began to request service in advance of orders from purchasers. As a result, Government graded and stamped beef in these plants was made available to retailers in advance of orders. Thus retailers located in any of the cities in which Government graders were stationed could make selections from rails of beef bearing the Government grade stamp. Reports from all such plants showed marked increases in numbers of carcasses handled and proportionate increases in the volume of beef business in those plants, which seemed conclusive evidence that, in proportion as the grading and stamping service became better known, the demand for officially graded and stamped beef increased.

The beef grading and stamping service as an experiment ended on June 30, 1928, when the service was put on a fee basis. During the period of the experiment all expenses were paid from the congressional appropriations made for research and demonstration purposes. The beef grading and stamping experimental service,

conducted at nine large markets over a period of 14 months, had demonstrated its practical use as an economic factor in marketing to the satisfaction of all the cooperating agencies. The willingness with which the service was paid for when it was put on a fee basis was telling evidence of its practical success.

### Permanent Service Established

The beef grading and stamping service was put on a permanent basis July 1, 1928. Grading was continued at all of the cities used in the experiment except St. Joseph, Mo., and Sioux City, Iowa, where the expense involved was unduly heavy in proportion to the quantity of beef offered for grading and stamping. A few months later, under special arrangements, the service was extended to the packers located at Topeka, Kans., and it has since been rendered weekly from the Kansas City office. Therefore, the service is now available at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago, Kansas City, Mo., Topeka, and Omaha.

Many requests have been received for service at other large cities but extension has not been possible so far because of insufficient funds.

### Qualifications of Graders

Before appointment to the service each Government grader must have had at least eight years' practical beef-grading and beef-buying-and-selling experience in commercial life, and his moral character must be well recommended. Every precaution is taken to secure competent men of high integrity. After appointment they are carefully trained in the application of the official grade standards. Moreover, the work of each grader in the service is carefully supervised at frequent periods to prevent possible deviations in his interpretation of the official standards. Every effort is made to insure a high degree of uniformity in the service at all markets.

Government graders are required to grade according to fixed official standards based on fundamental characteristics that are inherent in the carcass and not influenced by season, geographical location, or any other factor that is lacking in stability. The grade of a given carcass is determined by the degree of conformation, finish, and quality that it possesses. These factors do not vary as between cities, between sections of the country, or between seasons. What is "Choice" to-day in one city is "Choice" to-morrow and during all other days in every part of the country.

### How Beef Grading and Stamping Are Done

The official graders, stationed in the various cities, are subject to call, every week day, by packers, wholesalers, retailers, and others, located in the city. The time required to perform grading and stamping is paid for by the party who requests service, at the rate of \$2 per hour for the grader's time.

Under favorable conditions one man can grade 60 to 75 carcasses an hour. On this basis the cost of the service ranges from approximately  $2\frac{3}{4}$  to  $3\frac{1}{4}$  cents a carcass. In actual practice the cost per carcass varies in different plants in proportion to the number of carcasses offered for grading and stamping. The minimum charge

for service is \$1. Frequently in plants in which requests for grading are dependent upon receipt of orders for graded beef, the cost per carcass is increased proportionately.

To label the beef the stamp is applied to the carcass by the grader, or by an employee of the plant under the immediate supervision of the official grader. The use of the stamp under any other conditions is prohibited. When stamping carcasses, the roller is first applied to the hind shank and by a continuous rolling motion it is carried down the length of the side along the thick part of the back to the neck. One other imprint of the roller is made on the thick part of the forequarter, from the thin end of the rib to the fore part of the shoulders. Imprints on these parts of the carcass insure the presence of the printed label on all the major retail cuts.

The stamp shows both the class or kind of the beef and its grade. Thus steer beef is stamped "steer" followed by the grade term; Heifer beef is stamped "heifer" followed by the grade term; cow beef is stamped "cow" followed by the grade term. The ink used



FIGURE 1.—Government graded and stamped rib roast

is a pure vegetable compound and is entirely harmless. Under most conditions it disappears when the meat is cooked, although under some methods of cooking slight evidences may remain.

### Benefits of the Service

Continued marked variations in degree of quality or grade of a product marketed under a given grade term have been ruinous to the financial status of many otherwise promising concerns. Uninterrupted consumption of a product is largely dependent upon its conformity to certain generally recognized standards of quality.

#### To Stockmen

The Government's beef grading and stamping service benefits stockmen primarily because it practically insures the sale of their finished product, beef, for exactly what it is. Low-grade beef can not be substituted for beef of a higher grade, nor can one class be substituted for another. In proportion as stockmen become familiar

with the requirements of the various grades and understand the relative values from a market standpoint, they should be in a position to lengthen or shorten the feeding periods according to what the immediate situation and future prospects seem to indicate is best.

Cattlemen are dependent largely upon consumptive demand for satisfactory returns on their investment. If beef consumption is stimulated through more intelligent buying on the part of consumers, it reacts to the benefit of producers. Dealers have testified to increased sales since handling stamped beef. As meat is increasingly sold for just what it is worth it should eventually mean more satisfactory returns to producers.

#### To Slaughterers

The Government's beef grading and stamping service benefits slaughterers through the elimination of the possible "influence of bias" when grading is done by a plant employee. In seasons when the higher grades are relatively scarce and the demand for them is heavy, it has been the custom of packers generally to lower their ideas as to grade, and temporarily to substitute beef that is somewhat lower in quality than that called for. Such a practice tends to bring about seasonal standards and is likely to work to the eventual disadvantage of the packer.

As the Government grading is done by an impartial agency and according to fixed standards of quality, which do not change from season to season, practical uniformity is achieved. Purchases of stamped beef made to arrive in distant markets are more likely to be free from the rejections without cause that often occur in the case of unstamped beef when prices decline between the date of purchase and date of arrival. In fact, uniformity in quality of product especially if indicated by a label, increases confidence in purchases, tends to eliminate dissatisfaction and complaints, and lessens the need for arbitration and price adjustments. In all these respects slaughterers benefit materially through the use of this service.

#### To Wholesalers and Brokers

The Government's beef grading and stamping service benefits wholesalers and brokers through lessened sales resistance, and a decrease in the effort and time necessary to effect sales. The class and grade stamp on the beef is the Government's official statement of quality. Once a customer understands the significance of the grade terms, and that each term has a definite meaning as to certain degrees of quality, the time consumed in placing orders is reduced to a minimum.

Wholesalers who purchase carloads or less at long distances are assured that beef bearing the Government's stamp for the grade specified will meet all the requirements of that grade. In the purchase and sale of beef weight selection has always been a price factor. Therefore a statement of the weights desired should be added to the statement of the grade desired. Under normal trading conditions these two statements should meet all requirements.

In general, wholesalers and brokers benefit by the purchase and sale of Government graded and stamped beef through the elimination of dissatisfaction caused by substitution of lower grades, and

through decrease or elimination of the need for personal examination of the purchase which often involves expense and time that might be used more profitably.

#### To Retailers

The Government's beef grading and stamping service benefits retail meat dealers in many ways. It eliminates the possibility of substitution in their purchases. It overcomes the menace of unjustifiable price cutting on the part of the few unscrupulous dealers who advertise low-grade beef as high-grade beef at high-grade prices. Retailers who handle Government graded and stamped beef are enabled to place orders without having to visit packers' coolers, as the trade now recognizes that the quality represented by a given official grade name is always uniform within reasonable limits. This means a saving of time and expense and contributes to greater efficiency in operation.

Furthermore, the consistent sale of Government graded and stamped beef by a retail merchant in practically every instance has been the means of materially increasing his consumer patronage. Marked increases in business as a result have been reported by retailers in all parts of the country. That the official grade stamp on beef is the Government's statement of quality is becoming generally understood, and its importance is now generally recognized by consumers in many cities. Because of the assurance of dependability which the stamp signifies, reasonable profits on the stamped meats can be taken by retailers without objection from their patrons.

To conduct a satisfactory business the retailer needs the confidence of the consuming public. In this respect probably nothing helps quite so much as the sale of products that bear identifiable grade stamps, or marks signifying dependable quality. It raises the standard of retail meat merchandising in general and increases consumer confidence in dealers and in the products they sell.

#### To Hotels, Restaurants, and Dining Cars

The Government's beef grading and stamping service benefits hotels, restaurants, and dining cars by insuring to their patrons a uniform and dependable quality product. Serving meat that bears the Government stamp of any of the higher grades, in both public and private dining rooms, practically relieves the management of the possibility of the dissatisfaction and complaints that frequently result when low-grade meats are served. Many hotel and restaurant operators are not experienced judges of meat and are not in a position to judge quality accurately, either in making purchases or in detecting the substitution of low-grade beef when high-grade beef is called for in their specifications.

Success in their business depends almost entirely upon their ability to please patrons. To this end, the quality of the meat served in their dining rooms is of greatest importance, for to many the quality of the meat served determines the reputation of a dining room, and it is essential that there be a reasonable degree of uniformity. The hotel, restaurant, or dining-car manager can decide on the quality of beef he wishes to serve—the class and grade—and, by buying meat so stamped by the Government graders, can be sure

of serving exactly what he has planned. It therefore lessens the need for personal selection of meats by management or employee and saves both time and expense. This service has been a material factor in building business for many hotels and restaurants.

#### To Housekeepers

The Government's beef grading and stamping service benefits housekeepers because if they buy stamped beef (fig. 2), it assures a degree of satisfaction commensurate with the grade of beef asked for. Beef possesses an unusually wide range of quality, but to the average person all beef looks much alike. In the absence of some definite means of identifying the grade, beef for the most part is purchased for the table in haphazard fashion. Too often guesses are inadequate and dissatisfaction results. To the average person the beef looks good but proves to be tough and tasteless.

The Government's grade stamp on beef is an assurance of quality. An understanding of the significance of each grade term, and its

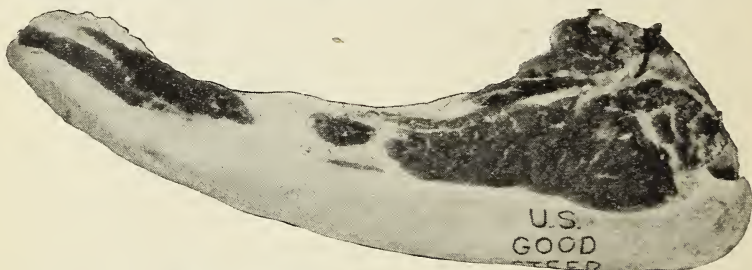


FIGURE 2.—Government graded and stamped club steak

relation to other grades above or below it, should enable anyone to make selections independent of advice or suggestions from another.

The classes of beef in order of excellence are steer and heifer beef, cow beef, stag beef, and bull beef; the official grades in order of excellence are Prime, Choice, Good, Medium, Common, Cutter, and Low Cutter. These grades, together, represent all beef produced which is sound and wholesome.<sup>1</sup> The stamp on the beef eliminates the possibility of substitution; it shows both the class or kind and the grade of the beef. As the quality represented by a given grade is uniform the country over, from season to season, consumers, wherever located, if they can buy beef that is stamped by Government graders, are assured of uniform quality and of the grade they ask for.

If consumers are located in a community that is not now handling Government-stamped beef they can make inquiry of the dealers as to how such beef can be obtained. Eventually it is hoped that the stamped beef can be available to all who wish it.

The Government's grade stamp on beef means all that it signifies—it is Uncle Sam's official statement of quality to consumers.

<sup>1</sup> At present (April, 1930) only the classes steer and heifer beef and the grades Prime, Choice, Good, and Medium are stamped, but the list may be increased at any time. The bulk of the beef now on the market is of medium grade; a considerable proportion is of good, a lesser quantity is of choice, and only a very little prime is available.

